

## **SELF-MANAGEMENT TRAITS IN CHETAN BHAGAT'S *THE 3 MISTAKES OF MY LIFE* AND ONE NIGHT @ THE CALL CENTER**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The beginning of college life is not just entering a college; the students enter an academic and cultural environment which mostly has even unspoken rules and sets of cultural mores. It is a period of transition. Arming our students with skills and positive attitude which would go a long way in enabling them to be self-managed has become the dire need. Choosing and scheduling purposeful actions would definitely help anyone to get to the right way to achieve the goal or dream. Understanding one's personal responsibilities and executing or dealing with them in the right and proper manner would make a student a better self-managed person. This paper attempts to discern how Chetan Bhagat, with a fine insight into human psychology, has presented self-management skill as a vital concept which would help students, by and large, to fare well in life. "Having mastered self-management, we will find that our education has really prepared us for the business of living" (O'Keefe 1).

**KEYWORDS:** Motivation, Positive Attitude, Self-Management

### **INTRODUCTION**

To succeed academically, professionally, and personally, we need to manage our feelings, behaviour, and thoughts in ways that contribute to our goals (O'Keefe 5).

Beginning of college life is the beginning to get acclimatized to a new environment. The beginning of college life is not just entering a college; the students enter an academic and cultural environment which mostly has even unspoken rules and sets of cultural mores. It is a period of transition. Apart from the transition from school to college, transition from vernacular medium of instruction to an environment in which subjects are taught only in English, transition from rural or semi-urban backdrop to urban environment etc. are some of the problems which would add as woes to some students. A considerable attention is to be paid to these transition issues as these stand as barriers to their studies, their personal development, and maintain an emotional balance which are quite necessary for their educational and personal success. This transition involves a great deal of stress and challenge. The challenges that students face exist in many areas. So arming our students with skills and positive attitude which would go a long way in enabling them to be self-managed has become the dire need. Self-management would help students develop holistically. "Having mastered self-management, we will find that our education has really prepared us for the business of living" (O'Keefe 1).

Chetan Bhagat is an Indian author, columnist and speaker who has to his credit five novels and a book which is a collection of his essays and columns. His debut novel titled *Five Point Someone – What not to do at IIT*, has sparked widespread interest among the Indian youth, especially among engineers. He gave up his job as Investment Banker with Deutsche Bank, to devote his entire time for pursuing his passion which is nothing other than writing and he has said about his ardent passion in his novel, *2 States: the Story of my Marriage*. Bhagat has created a niche for himself in the fictional world, through his fictions that centre on the Indian youth.

This paper attempts to discern how Chetan Bhagat, with a fine insight into human psychology, has presented self-management skill as a vital concept which would help students, by and large, to fare well in life. In his novels, Bhagat deals with the predicament of the present Indian youth. Any reader would agree to the fact that he has skillfully and successfully woven real life incidents into fiction. Fictional works present a panoramic outlook of life and characters. Fictional works mould and refashion the virtues and ills besetting society with an aim to transform human beings into better persons. The description of virtues shows the readers the right way to lead life, whereas, a lesson about what not to be done is to be learned from the negative aspects dealt with in a fiction. Francis Bacon rightly points out, “Read not to contradict and confute nor to believe and to take for granted, not to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider” (204). As imitations of human actions, fictional works verbally portray what people think, say and do in society. Literature has profoundly influenced and affected us since time immemorial. One cannot deny the fact that literature not only entertains but also teaches. Fictional works make readers familiar with the lives and perspectives of thousands of others. They give valuable insights into various facets of life. Master storytellers with their finest creations allow readers to understand even human conflict and the complexity of human life.

### **The Need for Self-Management Skill**

Many students begin their college life with hopes and dreams of earning a degree and subsequently getting a good job and settling in life. But difficulties spring up due to their inefficiency to cope up with separation from family, basic study techniques, time and stress management, goal setting, and handling emotions. Their problems may range from mild and short-lived to chronic and severe. For some students, the problems and challenges slow them down, but for some others, the same could even stop them from fulfilling their hopes and achieving their dreams. The students’ personal, academic, social and professional success depends on how effectively they tackle the various problems in their life. The sole key to achieve that sort of effectiveness is nothing but self-management. Self-management “necessitates choices – choices we make about how to manage every aspect of our lives – our motivation, time, study habits, personal relationship and self-esteem” (O’Keefe 8). “Self-management”, as ArunaJethwani puts it in the introduction to her book, *Success Sutra*, “will guide us on how to integrate our various ‘selves’ in order to overcome the many problems of life” (xiii).

With his vivid and simple storytelling style, Bhagat has attracted more readers and takes the credit of creating readers even among the non-reading public. Interest of the readers is sustained by the author with picturesque and humorous narration which does not allow boredom to creep in. He makes his fictions interesting with his expertise in bringing out even subtle emotions with great precision. Bhagat’s novels just do not stop with projecting the much esteemed virtues and values, but mirror even “what not to do” and the evils existing in society with a view to make society realize its mistakes and to make amends.

### **Traces of Self-Management Skills in *the 3 Mistakes of my Life***

The novel, *The 3 Mistakes of my Life*, centres on the protagonist, Govind Patel, and portrays the lives and attitudes of him and his two friends, Ishaan and Omi. Govind is “the poorest of the three... though Ishaan and Omi aren’t particularly wealthy. Ishaan’s dad works in the telephone exchange, and ... the salary is modest. Omi’s dad is the priest of the Swamibhakti temple,... And that does not pay well either” (Bhagat, *Mistakes* 5-6). Govind’s dad had ditched him and his mother and their sources of income are “a small Gujarati snacks business” run by his mother and the tuition classes handled by him (Bhagat, *Mistakes* 6). When Govind’s father walked out on them, Govind’s mother spent some months crying and some years consulting astrologers. When Govind was fifteen, he thought of a choice which would bring a little

income for their family and that would be convenient for his mother. He coaxed “her into opening the snacks business” (Bhagat, *Mistakes* 9). He studied in a school where “emphasis on studies was low with more teachers bunking classes than students” (Bhagat, *Mistakes* 9). Even in that environment, he could “hit a hundred in maths in class X” (Bhagat, *Mistakes* 9-10). And this made him “the only maths tutor in Belrampur” (Bhagat, *Mistakes* 10). Though he wished to do an engineering course, he ended up doing “mathshonours... in Amdavad University” (Bhagat, *Mistakes* 13).

Ishaan had run away “from NDA” and had spent a year without doing anything. His father is so critical about this and sarcastically comments, “Cut a cake today to celebrate one year of your uselessness”. It is at this juncture, Govind thinks that he needs to talk to his friends about their future. It is Govind who exhibits traces of self-management skill in narrowing down to the best choice that suits them from the limited choices they had. He says, “We don’t have a lot of choice” (Bhagat, *Mistakes* 3). The author, with a sense of social commitment, puts forth the most delicate question which most of the jobless youth face. Bhagat makes Govind ask his friends, “What do you plan to do with your life?” (Bhagat, *Mistakes* 14). Govind’s agonizing thoughts about himself and his concern for his friends get reflected in this question. Brian Tracy, in *Maximum Achievement*, says, “Your thoughts are a form of energy that vibrates at a speed determined by the level of emotional intensity accompanying the thought” (54). Choosing and scheduling purposeful actions would definitely help anyone to get to the right way to achieve the goal or dream. Govind grabs the right opportunity to open his idea about opening a “sports store”. He tells his friends, “We are going to open a cricket shop” and thereby, he tries to give a solution to their problem of joblessness and takes initiative to achieve his heart’s desire, for he tells his mother, “My heart is in business” (Bhagat, *Mistakes* 15 and 13). By suggesting Ishaan to “give playing tips to every kid who comes to buy” sports items, he not only brings in Ishaan’s full involvement, but also makes their business very close to his heart (Bhagat, *Mistakes* 17). Once they open the shop named, “Team India Cricket Shop”, Govind takes care of the accounts and sees to it that a share of their profit is reserved for renting a shop at “Navrangpura char rasta” (Bhagat, *Mistakes* 25). He succeeds in convincing his friends about the prospect of developing their business by renting a shop in the new shopping mall. He saves every penny so meticulously and pays the “deposit and three months advance rent” (Bhagat, *Mistakes* 101). His self-managed progress receives a heavy blow when their area is hit by an earthquake. With the crumbling of the new mall, his dream of extending their business shatters. The money they invested vanishes into thin air amidst the debris of the new mall. “Two years of scrimping and saving, twenty years of dreams – all wiped away in twenty seconds” (Bhagat, *Mistakes* 108). With much difficulty, he reconciles with the reality of losing the money. He learns the lesson of rising above difficulties. He understands that life is a roller coaster, navigating people through the ups and downs. “A positive attitude brings optimism into” one’s “life – affecting both the personal and professional aspects of living” (*Attitude: The Power of Positivity* 6).

### **Traces of Self-Management Skills in *One Night @ The Call Center***

Norman Vincent Peale opens his book, *Treasury of Courage and Confidence*, thus, “To experience the satisfaction and enjoyment of success in life, a definitive goal is essential....The goal must be definite and specific, not in any sense vague or fuzzy” (11). A series of incidents that happens on a critical and significant night in the lives of six call centre employees is the story of *One Night @ the Call Center*. The story involves the anxieties and insecurities of the Indian middle class society. The story is about Shyam, Priyanka, Radhika, Varun, Esha and Military Uncle who form the “Western Appliances Strategic Group” of the Connexions Call Center (Bhagat, *Night* 17). The novel has an interesting storyline which is intertwined with the lives of these characters, their skewed family relationships and office dynamics. Shyam Mehra, the protagonist of the story, calls himself “the black sheep” of his “family” as his cousins are either doctors or engineers. The only factor that gains him some recognition is that he has “a job” and gets “a salary at the end of the

month” (Bhagat, *Night* 15). This, once again echoes the pangs of sufferings of jobless youngsters and those who do not have a so-called ‘white collar’ job. At the call centre, he experiences humiliation when his boss, Bakshi, makes him do additional work like arranging the printout material in the proper order and taking photocopies of the ‘board meeting invite’. He is further humiliated when Bakshi deceives him and Varun by writing his own name on the “Western computers website manual” instead of the names of Shyam and Varun, who had toiled for six months to prepare it. He is in a dilemma whether to bear the brunt of Bakshi’s cheating and retain the job or to unmask Bakshi and quit.

Similarly, all the other characters also have their own problems. Varun, being a depressed son of separated parents, is not enthusiastic about himself. His dejection knows no bounds when he realizes the callous indifference of Bakshi. He suffers emotional suffocation without ventilation. Priyanka had parted ways with Shyam and feels happy and thrilled to get a proposal from Ganesh who works for Microsoft in the USA. But on the crucial night, when Varun shows her that Ganesh had forged his pictures to hide his baldness, she rejects Ganesh for cheating her. Radhika gets the shocking revelation about her husband’s illicit affair with a lady named Payal. She gets entrapped in the cobweb of familial dilemma by contemplating whether to adjust with her husband ignoring the betrayal or to get separated from him. Esha, who aspires to become a model, compromises by sleeping with a designer to get a modelling contract. Later, when she is deprived of the opportunity as she is short, she shockingly realises that she had been sexually exploited by the designer. Military Uncle’s longing for filial affection and his love for his grandson mirror yet another major social problem of the children disowning their aged parents.

The already over stressed people get to understand through Bakshi that the agency is going “to right size people” (Bhagat, *Night* 165). This news comes like a bolt from the blue and they all feel alike to have a break. Varun arranges for a Qualis and they go to a disco to have a quick drink. On their way back, the vehicle in which all these six people travel, slides onto “a mesh of iron construction rods”, beneath which there is a five feet deep “foundation hole of a building” (Bhagat, *Night* 197). At this critical juncture, they receive a call from God. God gives them clarity about the “four things a person needs for success” (Bhagat, *Night* 207). A “medium amount of intelligence”, “a bit of imagination”, “self-confidence” and “failure” are the four things needed for a person to succeed in life (Bhagat, *Night* 207-208). The mention of the word ‘failure’ would annoy any reader in a similar way it had annoyed the characters of the story. To go by the author’s words, “to be really successful, you must face failure. You have to experience it, feel it, taste it, suffer it. Only then can you shine.” He proceeds further to elaborate, “For once you taste failure, you have no fear. Then you don’t want to snuggle in your comfort zone anymore – you are ready to fly. And success is about flying, not snuggling” (Bhagat, *Night* 208). Bhagat effectively digs into the human psyche and penetrates into the tender longings and secret desires of his characters and explores the complexities of modern life. With a deft touch of reality, the author drives home the idea that our youth need to be self-managed and more focused. Set in the contemporary milieu, Bhagat’s novels bring out the angst of youth and the vagaries of human life with skillful narration. All the personal and social issues dealt with by the author are not isolated issues, but those which have penetrated into every social segment.

## CONCLUSIONS

“You must become a different person on the inside before you see different results on the outside”, says Brian Tracy, stressing the significance of self-management in one’s life (56). The success in college life chiefly relies on achieving a sense of balance. Understanding one’s personal responsibilities and executing or dealing with them in the right and proper manner would make a student a better self-managed person. Mastering self-management skill would definitely help the students fare well emotionally and intellectually. The effective link between healthy feeling, thinking and behavior decides how one manages oneself.

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